

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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WATERFOWL REGULATIONS REFLECT FAVORABLE DUCK AND GOOSE POPULATIONS THIS YEAR

Several significant changes in this fall's waterfowl hunting regulations have been adopted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it was announced today, as scientists predicted the numbers of ducks and geese flying south nationwide this autumn.

The changes include the opening of snow goose hunting in the Atlantic Flyway for the first time since 1931. A fall flight of 200,000 snow geese is expected. Also Atlantic brant hunting will be allowed in the Atlantic Flyway for the first time since 1972. Here again an increase in bird numbers is expected to bring on the order of 150,000 brant south from the Arctic. A harvest of redhead ducks has been authorized in a few selected areas of the country where local populations do not include many canvasbacks. The closing of Canada goose hunting in parts of California was adopted to protect the endangered Aleutian Canada goose on its wintering grounds.

The Fish and Wildlife Service also adopted "frameworks" for season length, shooting hours, and bag limits on migratory waterfowl hunting. Earliest and latest season dates for conventional seasons are October 1, 1975, and January 20, 1976. Shooting hours are one-half hour before sunrise to sunset. Maximum season lengths for ducks and geese were set for each Flyway.

The outlook for geese is good to excellent. The production and fall flights of Arctic and subarctic nesting geese are expected to compare favorably with the outstanding flights of 1973. Population increases should be particularly evident among birds nesting in the high Arctic where snow melted 2 to 3 weeks early this year. Good production is expected among the various Canada goose populations, lesser snow geese, Ross' geese, and Atlantic brant nesting in Arctic and subarctic Canada. In contrast, average or less production and fall flights are expected for Alaska nesting white-fronts destined for the Central and Pacific Flyways. The disappearance of snow from Wrangel Island was again late and below average production of snow geese is anticipated from there.

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The outlook for ducks is improved over last year. Although the number of ponds in prairie Canada where ducks nest and breed each summer was not as high as last year, water conditions remained excellent. A slight increase in duck breeding populations from 1974 and good production prospects indicate a favorable fall flight in 1975 that will be near the 1969-74 average.

The 1975 duck breeding population of 41 million was 2 percent above that of 1974 and 3 percent above the 1955-73 average. Increases in breeding populations, compared to 1974, were recorded in Montana, Colorado, South Dakota, and California. Smaller increases, in terms of percentage changes, were recorded in the Northwest Territories and southern Saskatchewan. Alaska was the major survey unit reporting a substantial decrease in breeding duck numbers because of weather.

Increases in continental populations from 1974 were indicated for all species except widgeon, green-winged teal, and pintail. Substantial increases were indicated for redhead, canvasback, and blue-winged teal.

The fall flight of ducks by Flyways is estimated as follows:

Pacific Flyway: Duck flights from southern Alberta will be similar to last year while those from northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories will be slightly larger than in 1974. The flight from Alaska will be substantially less than last year. Although increases are expected from California and Montana, the overall fall flight of ducks to the Pacific Flyway will be similar to that of 1974.

Central Flyway: Fall flights of ducks from the Northwest Territories, northern Alberta, Montana, Colorado, and the Dakotas will increase significantly this year. A slight increase is expected from Saskatchewan. Decreased fall flights are expected from Wyoming and Alaska. The resulting fall flight in the Central Flyway will be larger than that of 1974.

Mississippi Flyway: The fall flights from the Northwest Territories and northern portions of the Prairie Provinces will be greater this year than last. These increases and improved conditions in the Dakotas should lead to a larger fall flight than last year. The fall flight of ducks from Alaska will be smaller than last year. A slight increase is expected from southern Saskatchewan. As a result the 1975 fall flight of ducks to the Mississippi Flyway should be greater than in 1974.

Atlantic Flyway: Fall flights of ducks from northern survey areas will be increased from 1974 with the exception of Alaska, where a decrease fall flight is expected. The 1975 fall flight from southern Saskatchewan will be slightly greater than in 1974, but the fall flight from the southern Prairie Provinces will be similar to last year. The 1975 fall flight of ducks into the Atlantic Flyway is predicted to be similar to last year.

Forecasts for geese are made by species and population units rather than Flyways because these birds follow specific migratory patterns from diverse areas of the Arctic and northern latitudes.